

How We Recognize and Love a Strong and Kickass Female Character

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Raising females in the current politically-charged, and overall dangerous world for females to live in, can be difficult. Role models like Emma Watson, Ashley Graham, Malala Yousifazi, and Maya Angelou; primarily known for their activists in different topics such as feminist, body positivity, education for all girls, and overall fighting for rights for women is rising in popularity. With all of these real-life examples of fantastic strong females, it had also caused an exponential rise of strong female characters in books. Which bring us to the point of this article, the question of how do we define a strong female character? What characteristics does the strong female character in novels possess?

To answer this question, we must look at the most current definitions for the following; feminism, strong, and character to give the most comprehensive definition that can apply to all strong female characters regardless of genres. Merriam-Webster dictionary is the go-to online dictionary; therefore, I will show you some of the existing definition. Their definition for feminism noun; is the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes along with organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests. (Merriam-Webster, A). The definition for strong is multi-facet, but in this case, I choose the following meanings; 1: having or marked by great physical power 2: having moral or intellectual power 3: having great resources 4: striking or superior of its kind (Merriam-Webster, B). The definition for a character; 1: one of the attributes or features that make up and distinguish an individual. A feature used to separate distinguishable things into categories. (Merriam-Webster, C).

Overall, the definitions can be merged to create one definition for 'strong female character' however, looking at this through the lens of feminism, and how to identify a strong female character, the definition on offer here is not good enough. McKinney (1996) wrote that "The ability to take extreme adversity and turn it into an opportunity for growth is one of the qualities of strength that gives young adult female characters some of their greatest appeals." Extreme adversity, however, is not always on the menu while reading books that have strong female characters. Another possible way of identifying strong female character is seeing girls in the stories who refuse to be a victim under any circumstances and find the strength deep in themselves that promote growths. McKinney also touches upon the inward and outward of

female character development. The inward and outward journey in female character's development is significant and typically seen more in the female coming of age novels (McKinney, 1996). On that thread of thought, to define a strong female character is to refuse to appoint any arbitrary notion of gender role nor what gender to mean on the character. However, nowadays there are still problems with portraying of female characters who are POC, or part of other minority groups "...despite positive portrayals of certain arbitrary characteristics, such as gender, the series still features problematic depictions of certain groups, including people of color." (Philip, 2015). Philip's research is on the series Hunger Game and how feminism geopolitics works in that. The description of how Katniss, the character is clearly defined as a strong female character with no gender nor poorly thought out concept of female roles imposed upon on her. The main problem is that Katniss and other heroines are primarily white in the series while POC heroine such as Rue dies early on the series which is a well-known trope.

In conclusion, to define a kickass and strong female character, we need to look inward and outward for the general boundaries of what will be considered a strong female character. It can range widely from emotional strength to physical strength. Along with that, we need to reject any notion of whiteness when we look at what strong female character means. There are a high number of white heroines but a little number of POC or disabled heroine which implied that to be a strong heroine or strong female character, you need to be white. That notion needs to be deleted from the definition and views of strong female characters. Therefore, when you look at books and the main female characters you need to take into account more than just female vs. male views, you also need to make into account race and minorities.

References

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